

**United States Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Royal Gorge Field Office
3028 E. Main Street
Cañon City, CO 81212**

Environmental Assessment

Soapy Hill Allotment #05162 Grazing Authorization

DOI-BLM-CO-200-2013-0044 EA

February, 2013



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CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

1.1 IDENTIFYING INFORMATION

PROJECT TITLE: Range – New Grazing Authorization for Soapy Hill Allotment #05162

PLANNING UNIT: Waugh Mtn. / Tallahassee Creek Subregion #6

LEGAL DESCRIPTION: T17S, R72W, S. 6, 7, 18 Fremont County, Colorado
 T17S, R73W, S. 12 & 13
 Public Land Acres: 1,336

APPLICANT: Jerry Holmes

1.2 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

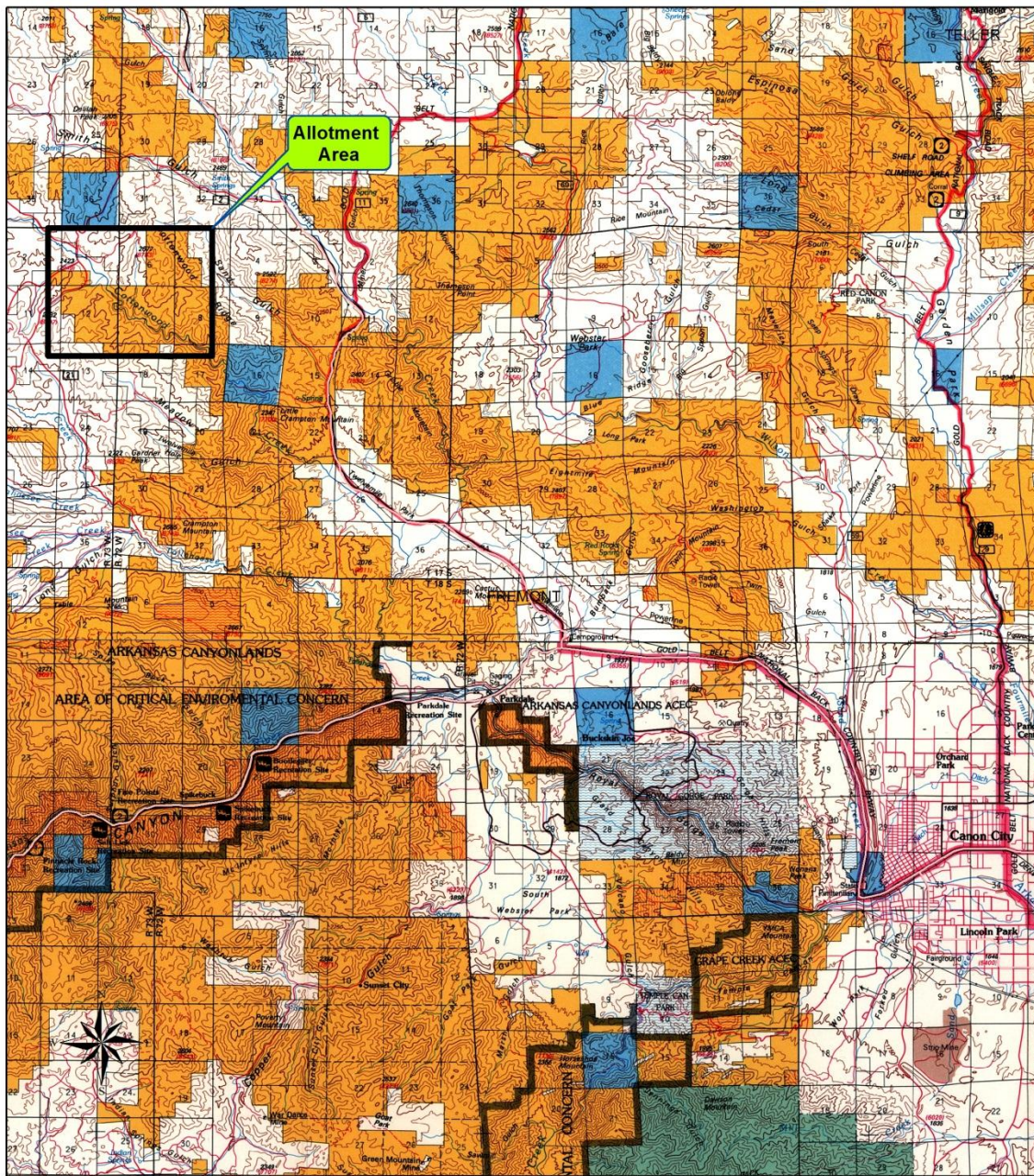
BACKGROUND: This EA has been prepared by the BLM to analyze the authorization to graze livestock on the Soapy Hill Allotment for a term of ten years. In addition, this EA analyzes on the ground structural range improvements. The new Soapy Hill Allotment (as proposed below) is currently made up of two allotments identified as Upper Meadow Gulch Allotment and Soapy Hill Allotment. Both allotments were previously analyzed for permit renewal under CO-050-RG-96-61 EA Upper Meadow Gulch and CO-050-RG-97-080 ADR Soapy Hill.

Grazing use on both allotments was previously scheduled as follows:

<u>Allotment</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Kind</u>	<u>Grazing Period</u>		<u>% Public Land</u>	<u>AUMs</u>
			<u>Begin</u>	<u>End</u>		
Upper Meadow Gulch	15	Cattle	10/1	- 3/31	100	90
Soapy Hill	9	Cattle	4/1	- 5/31	100	18
Soapy Hill	9	Cattle	8/1	- 10/31	100	29

For various reasons both allotments have been inactive for at least ten years.

Review of grazing use on these allotments included an assessment of the “health” of public land within these allotments in relation to Standards for Public Land Health and conformance with Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management in Colorado. “On the ground” efforts to gather information necessary to assess the land health on both the Soapy Hill and Upper Meadow Gulch Allotments occurred in 2003. The interdisciplinary land health evaluations indicated that the area is meeting applicable standards for public land health.



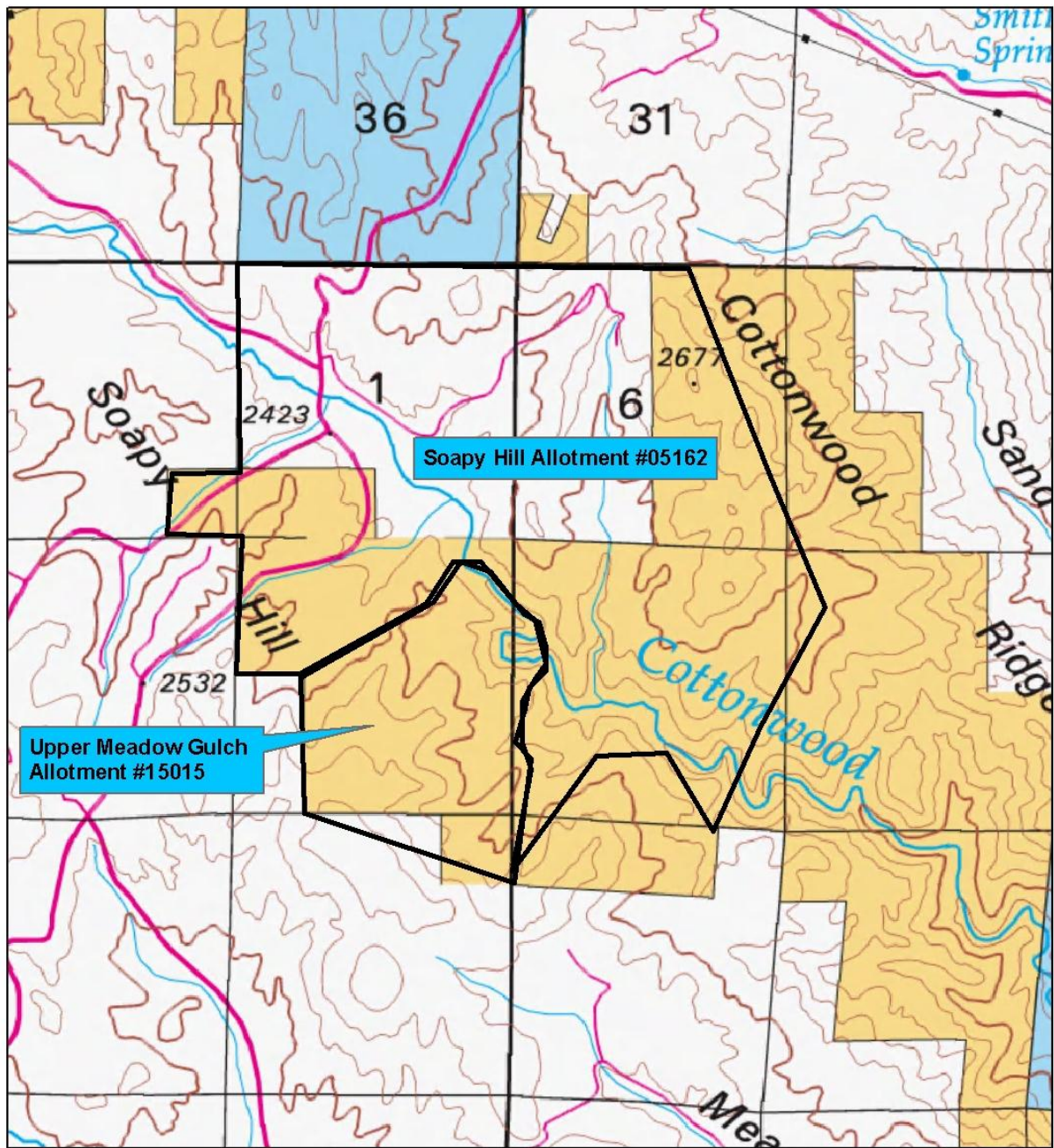
Soapy Hill Allotment #05162

DOI-BLM-CO-F02-2013-044 EA



NOTE TO MAP USERS

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Legend

- BLM
- State
- USFS
- Private

Soapy Hill Allotment #05162

DOI-BLM-CO-200-2013-0044 EA

T17S, R72W, S. 6, 7, 18

T17S, R73W, S. 12 & 13

0 0.15 0.3 0.6 0.9 Miles



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1.3 PURPOSE AND NEED

The purpose of the proposed action is to complete a site-specific evaluation of grazing that provides information to be analyzed by the BLM in conformance with the implementing regulations for the NEPA (40 CFR Part 1500), FLPMA, and Public Law 106-113 section 325 to determine whether changes are necessary to current management of the allotment to be in accordance with 43 CFR 4100 and consistent with the provisions of the Taylor Grazing Act, Public Rangelands Improvement Act. The purpose of the action is also to ensure that all authorizations implement provisions of, and is in conformance with, the Royal Gorge Resource Management Plan (5-13-1996), and in conformance with the Secretary Approved Rangeland Health Standards for Colorado. The action is needed to respond to application of new grazing use on BLM land.

1. This analysis is needed to consider the impacts of livestock grazing use on public lands within the respective allotment to determine if they are meeting the Standards for Public Land Health and are within the Guidelines for Livestock Grazing in Colorado.
2. Secondly, the proposed action is needed to ensure that grazing use continues to help the allotment meet Standards for Public Land Health and future grazing use on the allotment is consistent with Guidelines for Livestock Grazing Management in Colorado.

1.4 DECISION TO BE MADE

The BLM will decide whether to approve the proposed grazing authorization based on the analysis contained in this Environmental Assessment (EA). This EA will analyze impacts associated with issuing a ten year grazing permit with the installation of new range improvements. The BLM may choose to: a) accept the project as proposed, b) accept the project with modifications/mitigation, c) accept an alternative to the proposed action, or d) not authorize the project at this time. The finding associated with this EA may not constitute the final approval for the proposed action.

1.5 PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW

PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW: The Proposed Action is subject to and has been reviewed for conformance with the following plan (43 CFR 1610.5, BLM 1617.3):

Name of Plan: Royal Gorge Resource Management Plan

Date Approved: 05/13/96

Decision Number/Page: 6-4, 6-6, C-30, C-31, C-35, C-36, C-38, C-41, C-42, C-43, C-44

Decision Language:

6-4: Grazing is authorized on 70 allotments

6-6: 22 allotments are categorized as Improve

C-30: Base livestock grazing management on the 1981 Royal Gorge Area Grazing EIS.

C-31: Authorize adjustments in the actual AUMs when warranted by weather and other conditions.

C-35: Conduct EIS on allotments with conflicts, and adjust stocking rates and season of use accordingly.

- C-36: Grazing systems will be implemented by an IAP. Plans will be prepared in consultation, cooperation, and coordination with the permittee and other affected parties to meet multiple use objectives.
- C-38: Continue to construct range improvement projects on an as needed basis. Complete NEPA documentation on each project as needed.
- C-41: Adjustments in grazing use will be made by allotment on a case by case basis. Changes in number of livestock, season of use, duration of use, and class of livestock can be made based on monitoring studies and inventory data.
- C-42: The grazing treatment on Improve category allotments will require a rest standard to allow a time period for forage species to recover from the last grazing period before the plants are regrazed.
- C-43: Maximum allowable utilization on allotments with dormant season grazing will be 80% annual production on grass species and 60% of annual production on shrub species.
- C-44: On single pasture allotments with season long spring-summer grazing, utilization will be held to the 40 – 60% range on forage species in lieu of a rest standard. This requirement will be on high elevation allotments where deferment or dormant season use is impracticable because of deep snow and fencing the allotment into smaller units is uneconomical.

In January 1997, the Colorado State Office of the BLM approved the Standards for Public Land Health and amended all RMPs in the State. Standards describe the conditions needed to sustain public land health and apply to all uses of public lands.

Standard 1: Upland soils exhibit infiltration and permeability rates that are appropriate to soil type, climate, land form, and geologic processes.

Standard 2: Riparian systems associated with both running and standing water function properly and have the ability to recover from major disturbance such as fire, severe grazing, or 100-year floods.

Standard 3: Healthy, productive plant and animal communities of native and other desirable species are maintained at viable population levels commensurate with the species and habitat's potential.

Standard 4: Special status, threatened and endangered species (federal and state), and other plants and animals officially designated by the BLM, and their habitats are maintained or enhanced by sustaining healthy, native plant and animal communities.

Standard 5: The water quality of all water bodies, including ground water where applicable, located on or influenced by BLM lands will achieve or exceed the Water Quality Standards established by the State of Colorado.

Because standards exist for each of these five categories, a finding must be made for each of them in an environmental analysis. These findings are located in Chapter 3 of this document.

1.6 SCOPING, PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT AND ISSUES

1.5.1 Scoping: NEPA regulations (40 CFR §1500-1508) require that the BLM use a scoping process to identify potential significant issues in preparation for impact analysis. The principal goals of scoping are to allow public participation to identify issues, concerns, and potential impacts that require detailed analysis.

Persons/Public/Agencies Consulted: Scoping, by posting this project on the Royal Gorge Field Office website, was the primary mechanism used by the BLM to initially identify issues. In

addition to the website, agencies from the Colorado Parks and Wildlife were consulted. No comments or issues were received.

Issues Identified: No issues were identified during public scoping.

CHAPTER 2 - PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to provide information on the Proposed Action and Alternatives. Alternatives considered but not analyzed in detail are also discussed.

2.2 ALTERNATIVES ANALYZED IN DETAIL

2.2.1 Proposed Action

The Proposed Action:

1. Redefine the Soapy Hill Allotment boundary to create the new Soapy Hill Allotment.
2. Authorizes grazing use on the Soapy Hill Allotment as scheduled below and issues a ten year term grazing permit.
3. Construction of new structural range improvements for better livestock management on the allotment.
4. Analysis of Grazing Use Adaptive Management.

Under the Proposed Action alternative, the [Soapy Hill Allotment #05162](#) would be scheduled as follows:

<u>Pasture</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Kind</u>	<u>Grazing Period</u>		<u>% Public</u>	<u>AUMs</u>
			<u>Begin</u>	<u>End</u>		
Riparian	30	Cattle	May 25 – June 8		100%	14
Central	30	Cattle	June 9 – June 28		100%	20
West	30	Cattle	June 29 - July 8		100%	10

The following terms and conditions would be included in the grazing permit:

1. Maximum forage utilization levels on upland and riparian vegetation will be limited to 60%. If grazing use reaches these levels, livestock will be removed.
2. The grazing use sequence on the Central and West Pastures will be reversed on annual basis.
3. Salting and supplements will be placed away from riparian and water resources.
4. Designated range improvements will be constructed and fences identified for abandonment shall be removed prior to any grazing use on the allotment.
5. The permittee is required to perform maintenance annually on range improvements in accordance with signed Cooperative Agreements/Section 4 Permits prior to livestock turn-out.

6. The permittee and all persons associated with the allotment operations shall not damage, destroy, remove, move or disturb any objects or sites of cultural, paleontological or scientific value, such as historic or prehistoric resources, graves or grave markers, human remains, ruins, cabins, rock art, fossils and artifacts. If in connection with allotment operations under this authorization any of the above resources are encountered, the permittee shall protect such resources and immediately notify the BLM authorized officer of the findings.
7. This Grazing Permit has been fully processed in accordance with all applicable laws and regulations. The grazing schedule complies with Guidelines for Grazing Management in Colorado and is designed to help the public land achieve the Standards for Public Land Health. **In the event that the grazing schedule fails to help public land achieve the Standards for Public Land Health, grazing use on this allotment may be revised at any time.**

New Range Improvements: New range improvements are proposed under this alternative to help reduce any negative impacts and ensure that future livestock use continues to help the allotment meet Standards for Public Land Health. These improvements are designed to serve as livestock control features to improve even utilization and defer grazing use in areas as needed. The following stipulations will be followed:

- New construction will require temporary motorized access to these improvements. All efforts will be made to hide or post closed any remnant travel routes created.
- All improvements (new or existing) may require motorized access for future maintenance needs.
- The basic four wire BLM fence specifications would apply to all new fences under this proposal. The bottom wire would be smooth and set no less than 16 inches from ground level. The top wire would be barbed and set no more than 42 inches from ground level.
- Some vegetative brush clearing may be required for all projects. Tree and brush clearing would occur outside the breeding and brood rearing season for migratory birds (May 15 thru July 15).

New Boundary Fence

The new boundary fence consists of 0.75 miles of new fence built along the right-of-way of County Road 21 and along the private/BLM boundary line. A pipe gate would be installed at the intersection of CR 21 and the Soapy Hill BLM road. This gate would be locked open while livestock are not using the pasture. The private/BLM boundary line will be surveyed prior to fence construction.

Pasture Drift Fence

The Pasture Drift Fence consists of 0.2 miles of new fence that is built between an existing boundary fence and rocky outcropping. This fence serves as a livestock barrier to keep livestock in the designated pastures. An undeveloped trail is expected to be built in the area and coordination will occur with the recreation staff to place a walk thru gate in the fence where needed.

Pipeline and Tanks

A new pipeline would be buried from an existing spring development identified as the Soapy Hill spring and service two new permanent livestock tanks (one on each side of the existing

fence). The new pipeline would be 0.25 miles in length and buried 6 – 24 inches below the surface. The segment of this pipeline that travels under BLM road # 5865 will be at least 12 inches below the current roadbed. The pipeline would consist of 1 ½ HDP DR11 pipe and the tanks would either consist of recycled rubber tires or galvanized tanks. Water flow into each tank will be controlled with a float valve and the tanks will contain small animal escape ramps.

Cottonwood Creek Fence Removal

There are two fence segments that total approximately 1 mile in length located along the Cottonwood Creek riparian that would be abandoned and removed by the permittee. Temporary motorized access would be required along the existing administrative route for the removal period.

Monitoring Plan

The Soapy Hill Allotment would be monitored for general compliance and management effectiveness. Utilization on upland and riparian forage would be studied in all three pastures for the first three years to determine accuracy in stocking rates and compliance.

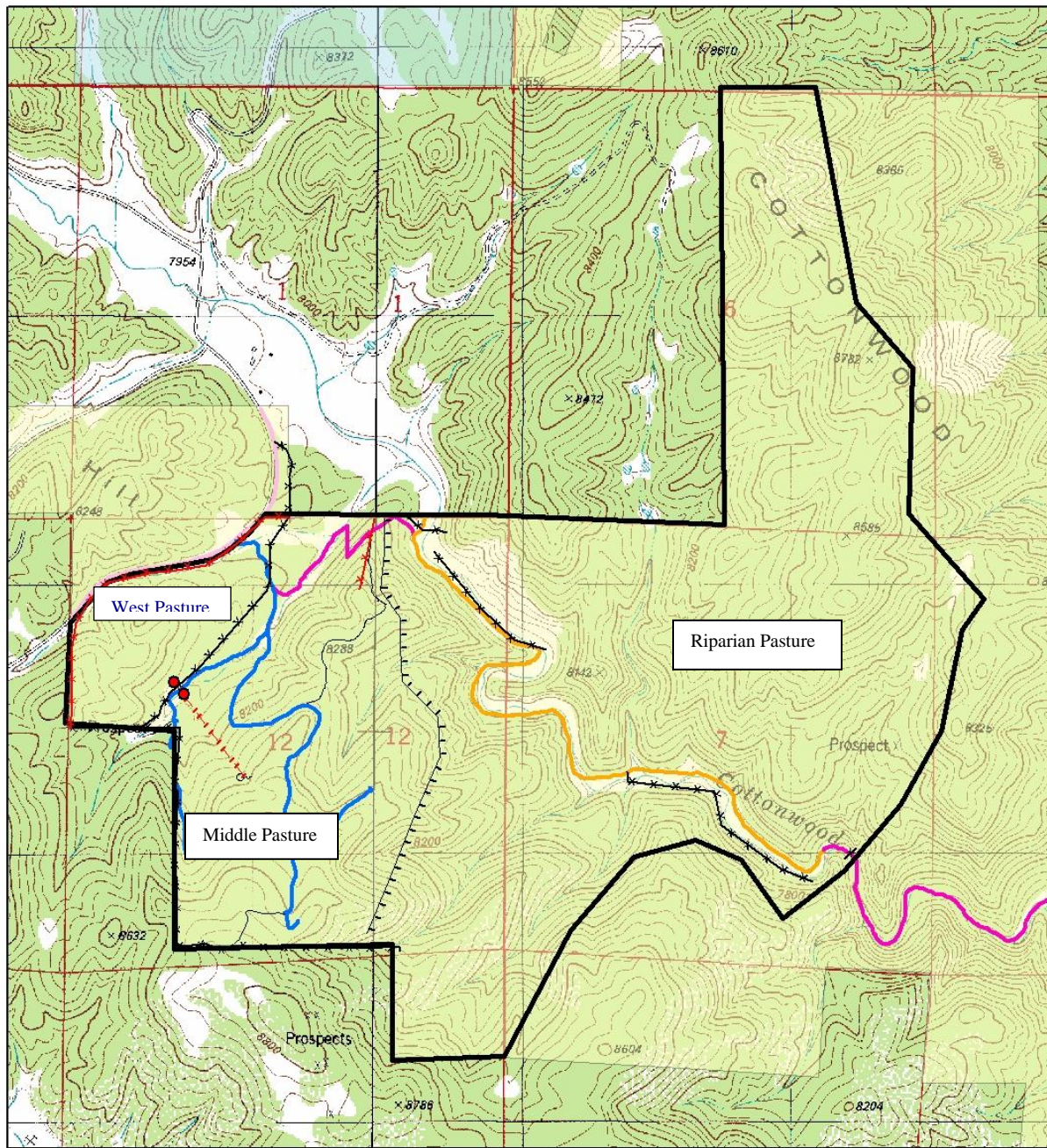
Adaptive Management Options

Adaptive management is defined as a process where land managers implement management practices that are designed to achieve an acceptable resource condition in a timely manner. In addition, practices could be implemented when unforeseen circumstances occur such as drought and/or fire. All adaptive actions will be within the scope of effects in this document, or a supplemental NEPA document (DNA) will be prepared. The table below provides a list of potential Adaptive Grazing Management Actions that can be applied as necessary:

Adaptive Grazing Management Actions (Tool Box):

1. Change season of use – do not exceed permitted AUMs
2. Change animal numbers- do not exceed permitted AUMs
3. Change animal class - do not exceed permitted AUMs
4. Change number of days livestock utilize a specific pasture
5. Adjust permitted AUMs based on appropriate monitoring averaged over three years
6. Defer livestock turn-on/off date
7. Rest from livestock grazing for one or more seasons
8. Construction of permanent fencing to control livestock distribution patterns, or exclude livestock from areas of concern (riparian, wetlands, springs)
9. Construct electric temporary fencing to control livestock distribution patterns
10. Remove permanent fencing and temporary fencing
11. Construct livestock water developments (springs, infiltrators, pipelines, tanks, windmill, sediment traps, wells, stock dams, submersible pumps, solar)
12. Remove existing water developments (springs, infiltrators, pipelines, tanks, windmill, sediment traps, wells, stock dams, submersible pumps, solar)
13. Trailing of livestock across the allotment

Soapy Hill Allotment #05162



- Legend**
- Soapy Hill Boundary
 - Existing Fence
 - Proposed Fence
 - Existing Spring
 - Proposed Pipeline
 - Proposed Tanks
 - Road
 - BLM
 - State
 - USFS
 - Private

Soapy Hill Allotment #05162

DOI-BLM-CO-200-2013-0044 EA

T17S, R72W, S. 6, 7, 18

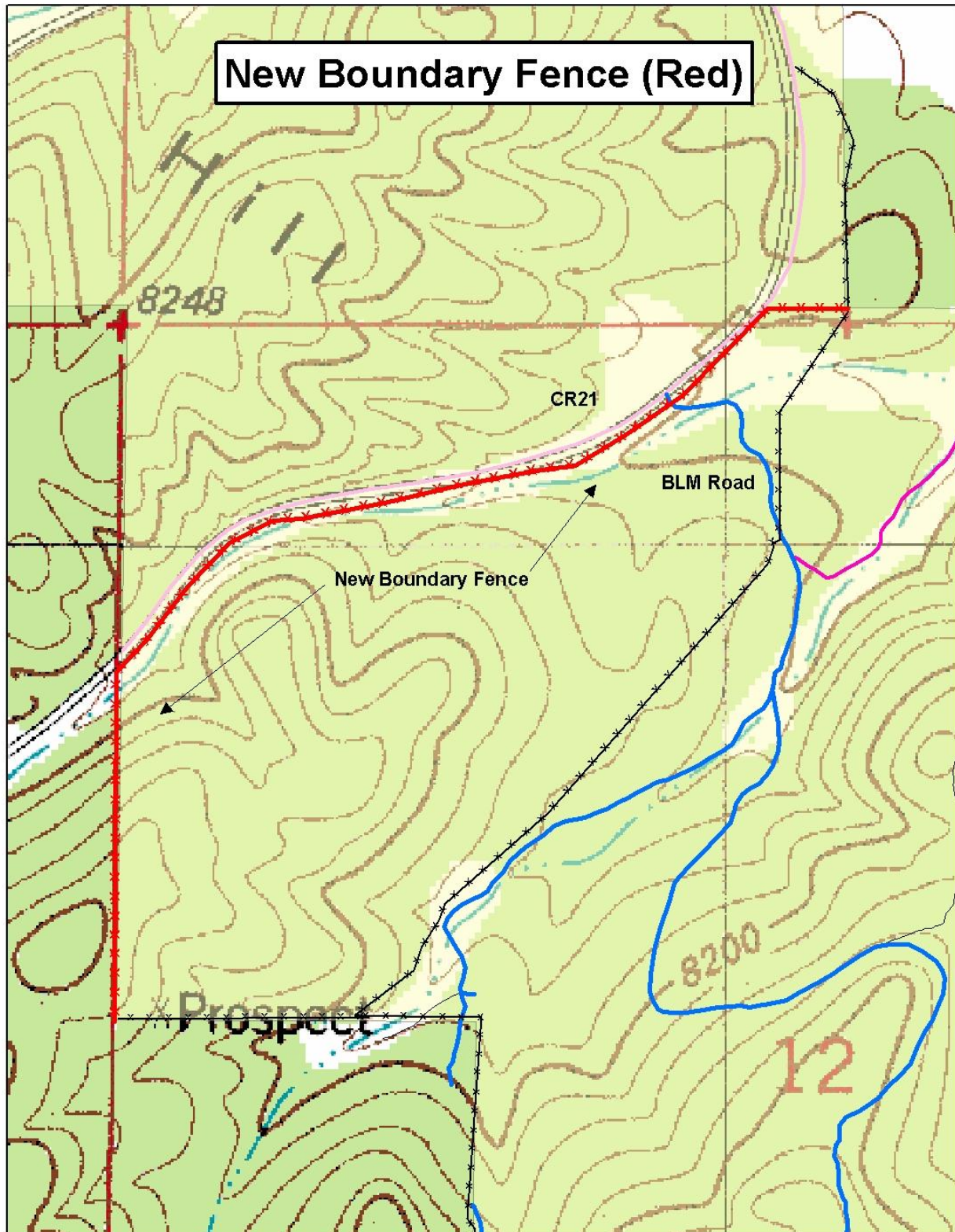
T17S, R73W, S. 12 & 13

0 0.1 0.2 0.4 0.6 Miles

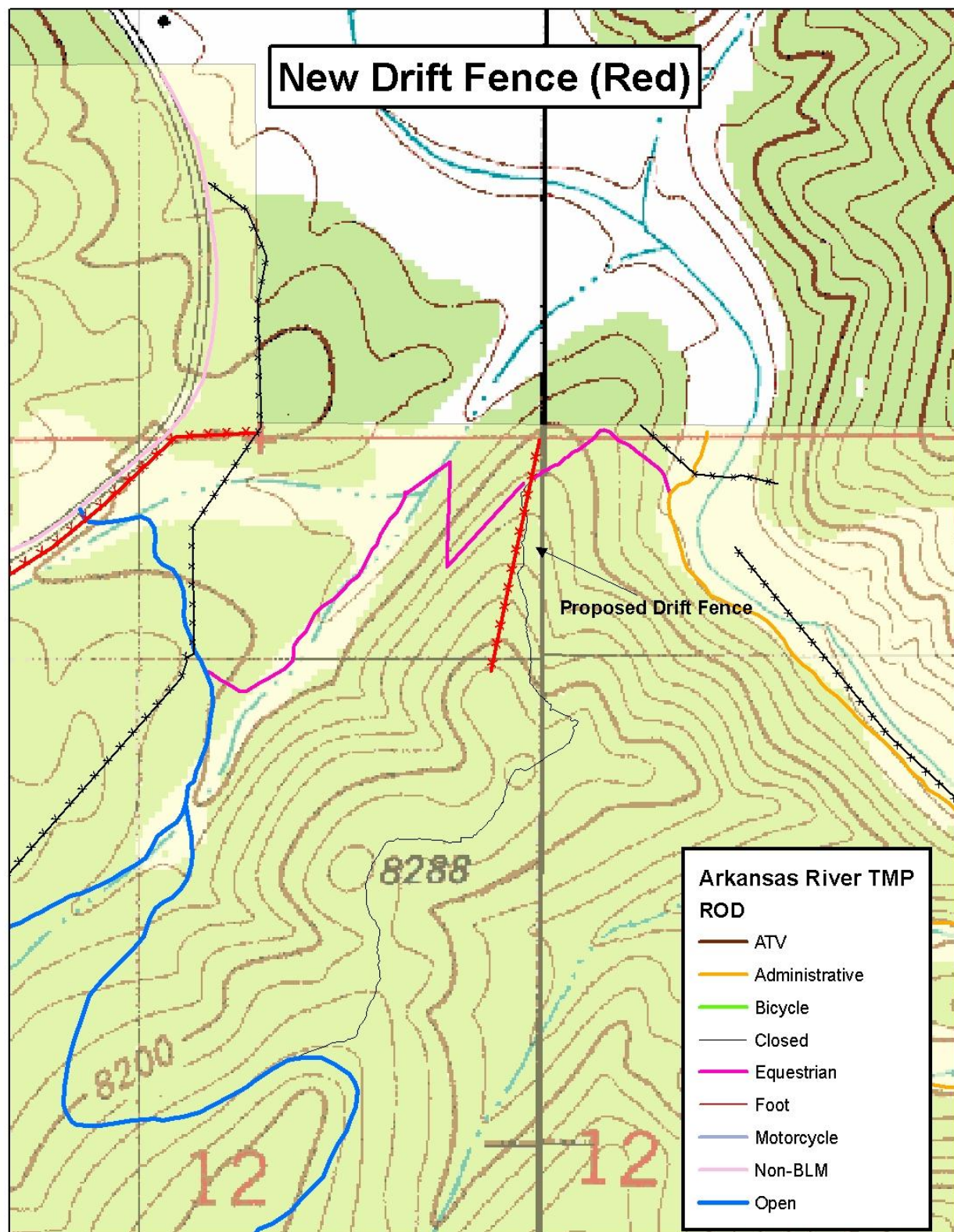


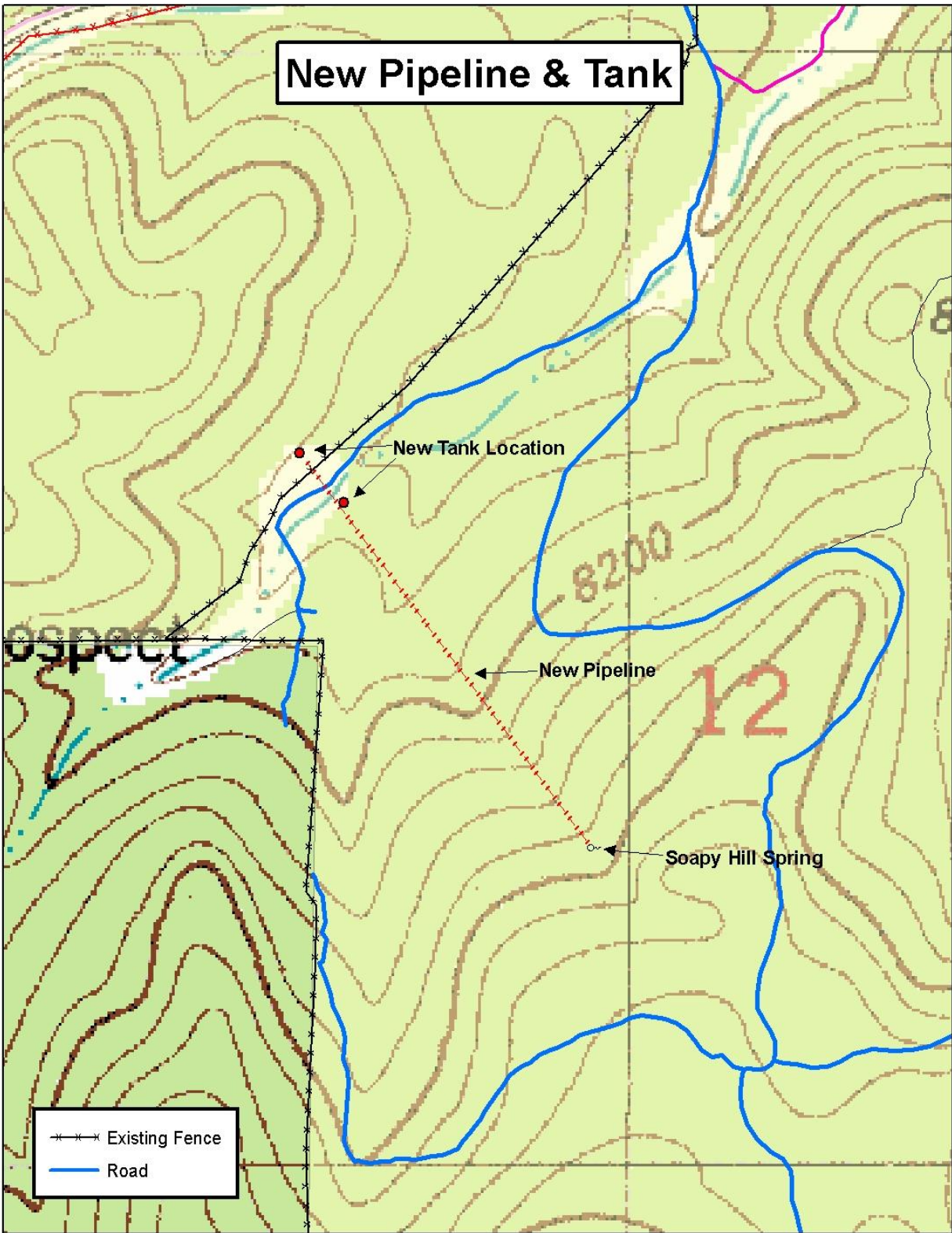
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New Boundary Fence

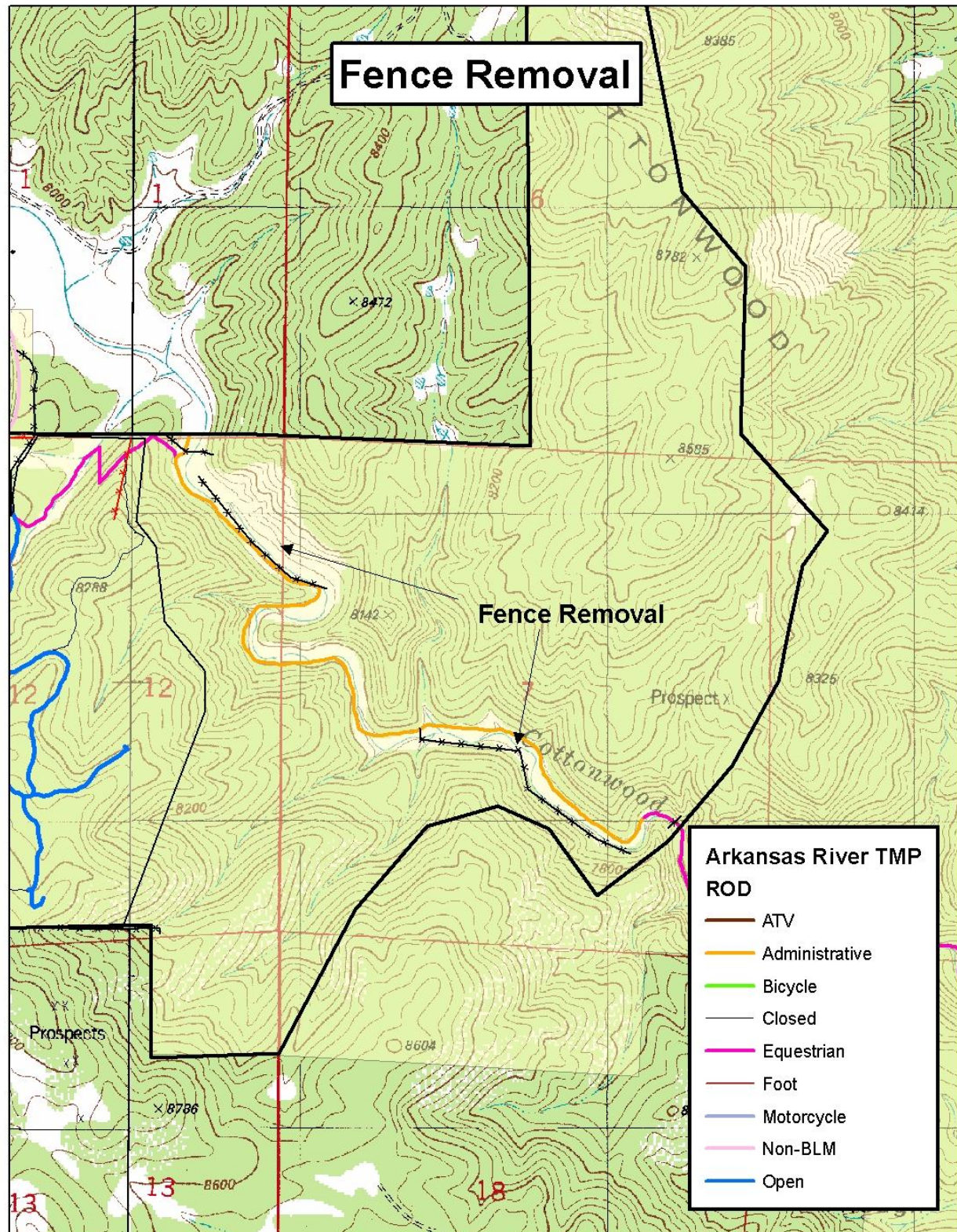


Pasture Drift Fence Pipeline and Tanks





Cottonwood Creek Fence Removal



2.2.2 No Grazing Alternative

Under this alternative grazing use would not be authorized on the new Soapy Hill Allotment. The BLM would initiate a process in accordance with the 4100 regulations to permanently eliminate grazing use on both the Soapy Hill and Upper Meadow Gulch allotments.

2.2.3 Dormant Season Grazing Use

Under this alternative all actions described in the Proposed Action alternative would apply here except livestock use would be authorized during the dormant season of vegetative growth.

Grazing use on the [Soapy Hill Allotment #05162](#) would be authorized as follows:

<u>Pasture</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Kind</u>	<u>Grazing Period</u>		<u>% Public</u> <u>Land</u>	<u>AUMs</u>
			<u>Begin</u>	<u>End</u>		
Riparian	30	Cattle	Oct. 1	March 31	100%	14
Central	30	Cattle	Oct. 1	March 31	100%	20
West	30	Cattle	Oct. 1	March 31	100%	10

Terms & Conditions:

1. Maximum forage utilization levels on upland and riparian vegetation will be limited to 60%. If grazing use reaches these levels, livestock will be removed.
2. Grazing use is authorized within the designated pastures during any time within the designated grazing period (October 1 – March 31) as long as the assigned AUMs are not exceeded.
3. Salting and supplements will be placed away from riparian and water resources.
4. Designated range improvements will be constructed and fences identified for abandonment shall be removed prior to any grazing use on the allotment.
5. The permittee is required to perform maintenance annually on range improvements in accordance with signed Cooperative Agreements/Section 4 Permits prior to livestock turn-out.
6. The permittee and all persons associated with the allotment operations shall not damage, destroy, remove, move or disturb any objects or sites of cultural, paleontological or scientific value, such as historic or prehistoric resources, graves or grave markers, human remains, ruins, cabins, rock art, fossils and artifacts. If in connection with allotment operations under this authorization any of the above resources are encountered, the permittee shall protect such resources and immediately notify the BLM authorized officer of the findings.
7. This Grazing Permit has been fully processed in accordance with all applicable laws and regulations. The grazing schedule complies with Guidelines for Grazing Management in Colorado and is designed to help the public land achieve the Standards for Public Land Health. **In the event that the grazing schedule fails to help public land achieve the Standards for Public Land Health, grazing use on this allotment may be revised at any time.**

2.3 Alternatives Considered but not Analyzed in Detail

None.

CHAPTER 3 - AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT AND EFFECTS

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This section provides a description of the human and natural environmental resources that could be affected by the Proposed Action and presents comparative analyses of the direct, indirect and cumulative effects on the affected environment stemming from the implementation of the actions under the Proposed Action and other alternatives analyzed.

3.1.1 Interdisciplinary Team Review

The following table is provided as a mechanism for resource staff review, to identify those resource values with issues or potential impacts from the proposed action and/or alternatives. Those resources identified in the table as impacted or potentially impacted will be brought forward for analysis.

<u>Resource</u>	<u>Initial and date</u>	<u>Comment or Reason for Dismissal from Analysis</u>
<u>Air Quality</u> <i>Ty Webb, Chad Meister, Melissa Hovey</i>	TW, 2/22/13	This action will not result in any significant impacts to air quality.
<u>Geology/Minerals</u> <i>Stephanie Carter, Melissa Smeins</i>	SSC, 3/18/13	This action will not result in any significant impacts to mineral resources. However, the federal minerals in the proposed project area are open to mineral location, therefore requiring coordination between surface uses as applicable. If there are unpatented mining claims that are active in the proposed project location, any associated claim markers encountered during project implementation cannot be disturbed. As of March 2013, there are no active claims in these areas.
<u>Soils</u> <i>Jeff Williams</i>	JW, 4/1/13	Standard 1 is currently meeting on both allotments and the proposed action and alternatives as described will not deviate from this achievement. Any impacts would be negligible.
<u>Water Quality</u> <u>Surface and Ground</u> <i>John Smeins</i>	JS, 3/18/13	Water quality on the allotment is currently meeting standards. The proposed grazing and range improvements would have immeasurable impacts to water quality at the utilization levels and rotation described.
<u>Invasive Plants</u> <i>John Lamman</i>	JL, 03/20/2013	See affected environment.
<u>T&E and Sensitive Species</u> <i>Matt Rustand</i>	MR, 3/29/2013	There are no known threatened and endangered, or sensitive species known to inhabit this location. The proposed action will not result in any significant impacts to threatened and endangered or sensitive species.
<u>Vegetation</u> <i>Jeff Williams, Chris Cloninger, John Lamman</i>	JW 4/1/13	See affected environment
<u>Wetlands and Riparian</u> <i>Dave Gilbert</i>	3/25/13	See affected environment.

<u>Resource</u>	<u>Initial and date</u>	<u>Comment or Reason for Dismissal from Analysis</u>
<u>Wildlife Aquatic</u> <i>Dave Gilbert</i>	3/25/13	See affected environment.
<u>Wildlife Terrestrial</u> <i>Matt Rustand</i>	MR, 3/29/2013	See affected environment.
<u>Migratory Birds</u> <i>Matt Rustand</i>	MR, 3/29/2013	See affected environment.
<u>Cultural Resources</u> <i>Monica Weimer, Michael Troyer</i>	MDT 5/30/2013	The proposed action will not impact historic properties (those that are eligible for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places). A few prehistoric and historic sites are present in the vicinity of the area of potential effect [see Report CR-RG-13-124 (P)]. However, no cultural resources were recorded during the field inventory. Therefore, no historic properties will be affected by the proposed undertaking.
<u>Native American Religious Concerns</u> <i>Monica Weimer, Michael Troyer</i>	MDT 5/30/2013	The proposed action will not impact traditional cultural properties. Although aboriginal sites are present in the vicinity of the area of potential effect, no possible traditional cultural properties were located during the cultural resources inventory (see Cultural Resources section, above). There is no other known evidence that suggests the project area holds special significance for Native Americans.
<u>Economics</u> <i>Dave Epstein, Martin Weimer</i>	mw, 2/21/13	This action will not result in significant impacts to the socio economics of the region or individuals.
<u>Paleontology</u> <i>Melissa Smeins, Stephanie Carter</i>	SSC, 3/18/13	This action will not result in any significant impacts to paleontological resources.
<u>Visual Resources</u> <i>Kalem Lenard</i>	KL, 2/26/2013	Not impacted. The project is located in an area that is seldom visited by the public and is not readily visible from a major roadway or houses. The water tanks have the highest potential for visual impacts and these are located in the bottom of a draw outside of view from any key observations points.
<u>Environmental Justice</u> <i>Martin Weimer</i>	mw, 2/21/13	The proposed action affects areas that are rural in nature. The land adjacent to these parcels is open rangeland, as a result, there are no minority or low-income populations in or near the project area. As such, the proposal will not have a disproportionately high or adverse environmental effect on minority or low-income populations.
<u>Wastes Hazardous or Solid</u> <i>Stephanie Carter</i>	SSC, 3/18/13	If the grazing authorization includes projects that involve oil or fuel usage, transfer or storage, an adequate spill kit and shovels are required to be onsite during project implementation. The proponent will be responsible for adhering to all applicable local, State and Federal regulations in the event of a spill, which includes following the proper notification procedures in BLM's Spill Contingency Plan. If concrete is proposed as part of any project conducted with this authorization, all concrete washout water needs to be contained and properly disposed of at a permitted offsite disposal facility.
<u>Recreation</u> <i>Kalem Lenard</i>	KL, 2/26/2013	Not impacted. The project area sees very little recreation use. Introduction of grazing and the associated improvements would not impact the little recreation use that does occur in the area.

<u>Resource</u>	<u>Initial and date</u>	<u>Comment or Reason for Dismissal from Analysis</u>
<u>Farmlands Prime and Unique</u> <i>Jeff Williams, Chris Cloninger, John Lamman</i>	JW 4/1/13	Not Present
<u>Lands and Realty</u> <i>Steve Craddock, Vera Matthews</i>	vm, 2/21/2013	This action will not result in significant impacts to the Realty actions in the area. There is two RS-2477 roads COC-44142 located in 6pm, T17S, R73W, Sec. 1, 2, 12., which authorizes Fremont CR-26 and CR-21 a fiber optics line COC-23496 runs alongside CR-21 in 6pm, T17S, R73W, Sec. 1, and 12., and there is also a power site reserve COC-17097 "Intpr. PW Res 107" located in 6pm, T17S R72W Sec.7., if the power site reserve is ever exercised, it will take precedence over any other lands actions, and will also be subject to NEPA review. There is a notation of COC- 0-28370 for public law 167 concerning unpatented mining claims. These existing lands actions will not be impacted by the proposed action.
<u>Wilderness, WSAs, ACECs, Wild & Scenic Rivers</u> <i>Kalem Lenard</i>	KL, 2/26/2013	Not present.
<u>Wilderness Characteristics</u> <i>Kalem Lenard</i>	KL, 2/26/2013	Not present.
<u>Range Management</u> <i>Jeff Williams, Chris Cloninger, John Lamman</i>	JW 4/1/13	See affected environment
<u>Forest Management</u> <i>Ken Reed</i>	KR, 2/20/2013	No impacts to forest management under all alternatives. A large portion of the Soapy Hill allotment was thinned during the Spring of 2011. The understory response to the new forest condition has been tremendous.
<u>Cadastral Survey</u> <i>Jeff Covington</i>	JC 2/20/13	
<u>Noise</u> <i>Martin Weimer</i>	mw, 2/21/13	This action will not result in any significant impacts due to noise or result in any increased noise levels.
<u>Fire</u> <i>Bob Hurley</i>	BH, 2/20/13	The proposed action will not create or elevate risk factors leading to unwanted wildland fire ignition.
<u>Law Enforcement</u> <i>Steve Cunningham</i>	mw, 2/21/13 for SC	There are no law enforcement issues associated with this action.

The affected resources brought forward for analysis include:

- Invasive Plants
- Vegetation
- Wetlands and Riparian Zones
- Wildlife Aquatic

- Wildlife Terrestrial
- Migratory Birds
- Range Management

3.2 BIOLOGICAL RESOURCES

3.2.1 Invasive Plants*

Affected Environment: The primary invasive plant known to occur within the project boundary is Canada thistle. Invasive plants known to occur within a seven mile radius of the project boundary include: Diffuse knapweed, Tamarisk, Leafy spurge, Scotch thistle, Yellow toadflax, and Musk thistle.

Environmental Effects

Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts: The impacts from the type of grazing proposed in this alternative would not result in the type of soil disturbance needed to increase the risk of invasive plant invasion. Proposed construction projects have potential to spread and or introduce invasive plants.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: Equipment used in proposed construction projects should be washed prior to entering the project area to remove any plant materials, soil, or grease. Areas disturbed by project implementation should be monitored for the presence of weeds on the Colorado State Noxious Weed list. Identified noxious weeds will be treated.

No Grazing Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Removal of livestock grazing from the allotment in the proposed action could allow some populations of invasive plants to increase in size.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None

Dormant Season Grazing Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: The impacts from the type of grazing proposed in this alternative would not result in the type of soil disturbance needed to increase the risk of invasive plant invasion. Proposed construction projects have potential to spread and or introduce invasive plants.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: Equipment used in proposed construction projects should be washed prior to entering the project area to remove any plant materials, soil, or grease. Areas disturbed by project implementation should be monitored for the presence of weeds on the Colorado State Noxious Weed list. Identified noxious weeds will be treated.

*Invasive plants are plants that are not part of (if exotic), or are a minor component of (if native), the original plant community or communities that have the potential to become a dominant or co-dominant species on the site if their future establishment and growth are not actively controlled by management interventions, or are classified as exotic or noxious plants under state or federal law. Species that become dominant for only one to several years (e.g., short-term response to drought or wildfire) are not invasive plants.

3.2.2 Vegetation (includes a finding on standard 3)

Affected Environment: The elevation for the allotment ranges from 8,000 to 8,500 feet. The climate is semi-arid with precipitation averaging 12 to 18 inches annually. Typically the average frost free period is between June 8 and September 12.

The vegetation communities on the allotment are diverse depending on aspect and include a variety of small open grassland parks, mixed shrub-grasslands, ponderosa intermixed grasslands, Douglas-fir woodlands and pinyon-juniper woodlands. The warmer south facing exposures typically include western wheatgrass, Indian ricegrass, sand dropseed, gambel oak, mountain mahogany, and wax currant. The ridge tops and north facing aspects typically include Arizona fescue, mountain muhly, Squirrel tail, Junegrass, gambel oak, and Parry oatgrass. Forbs are a minor vegetative component and include pussytoes, yarrow, wild buckwheat, geranium, golden pea, and penstemon. The estimated total production on these sites varies from 500 to 3,000 pounds per acre per year depending on the site and annual precipitation.

The allotment was evaluated for Public Land Health Standards in 2003. The assessment indicated that, under current management, livestock grazing does not appear to be preventing public land from meeting applicable land health standards. Through the assessment however, it was determined that a portion of the pinyon-juniper woodland sites and some associated grassland areas was not meeting public land health standards. Pinyon and juniper woodlands are steadily encroaching into naturally open grassland range sites and pinyon/juniper range site canopies have steadily grown increasingly dense. As this continues over time, many areas are characterized by decreasing amounts of herbaceous plant cover and higher amounts of bare ground. As a result, productivity, vigor and diversity of a site decrease. These changes in the plant communities appear not to be directly related to livestock grazing.

Environmental Effects

Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts: The action authorizes grazing use during the spring period under a three pasture deferred rotation. Grazing during this period could be harmful to cool season grasses when grazing use is heavy and re-occurs in the same area year after year. However, the proposed action includes mitigation measures such as deferring grazing use to shorter periods during vegetative growth within each pasture, changing the pasture sequence from year to year, and implementing conservative utilization levels that would help to reduce negative impacts to vegetation. The new range improvements proposed on the allotment (fences and new water system) will have minor impacts to vegetation, but these impacts will be outweighed by the long term benefits these projects promote. The action also utilizes adaptive management tools to

allow for flexibility due to environmental changes and better livestock control management. This would decrease residual vegetation in areas where it is less than desirable and increase the vigor of individual plants through better livestock distribution across the allotment.

The allotment is currently meeting public land health for Standard #3. Authorizing grazing use on the Soapy Hill allotment as described in the proposed action would not have any negative impacts and continue to promote achievement of public land health standards.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None.

Cumulative Impacts: See Cumulative Impact Summary

No Grazing Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Not renewing the current grazing permit as prescribed by this alternative would remove grazing use on vegetation on the public land. This in turn would result in an initial increase in plant vigor and litter production. However, precipitation in this area can be fairly low. Due to these dry conditions, decomposition of litter and “standing dead” plant material is relatively slow and the return of nutrients from these materials to the soil is therefore also slow. Livestock grazing, when managed properly, tends to harvest plant biomass and return a higher portion of the nutrients to the soil (and more quickly) than allowing the plant to decompose without grazing use. Furthermore, harvesting a portion of a plant’s biomass, when done properly, tends to stimulate new growth and improve plant vigor. The effect of livestock hooves also tends to break up soil crusts and improve the soil surface as a seed bed for plant reproduction. Therefore, a lack of periodic grazing use in the Soapy Hill Allotment could result in an eventual decrease in plant vigor, and the amount of vegetative and litter cover. This alternative would initially increase plant vigor and litter production but would eventually result in movement away from applicable standards.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: Monitor for livestock trespass.

Dormant Season Use Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: The Dormant Season Use Alternative defers grazing use to a period of time vegetation is in dormancy and harvest occurs on residual stubble. Plants have completed their life cycle and are less susceptible to herbivory. The new range improvements and adaptive management as described in the proposed action would reduce any negative impacts.

Authorizing grazing use during plant dormancy would not have any negative impacts and continue to promote achievement of public land health standards.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None.

3.2.3 Wetlands & Riparian Zones (includes a finding on standard 2)

Affected Environment: One pasture of this allotment contains 2.0 miles of Cottonwood Creek, a tributary to Currant Creek and eventually the Arkansas River. This stream is perennial, but has dried recently in subsequent late summers in portions due to prolonged drought. Previously this area supported a popular fishery indicating the magnitude of current drought. The stream has been un-allotted for many years and any grazing use has been only incidental and light. Historically, this region had a different, likely more intense grazing regimes and Cottonwood

Creek in this area is down-cut with some active side head-cutting, but now exhibits a well healed riparian zone down in an entrenched stream bottom. Old fences, homesteads, historic roads all indicate much more intense pressure roughly a hundred years ago. None of the other related actions affect wetlands outside of the riparian pasture.

Environmental Effects

Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts: There is a direct affect on riparian vegetation from this action in that cows will wander into the entrenched riparian area off of the flatter adjacent terraces, cross it in numerous locations as they travel up and downstream and graze within the flatter portions of the stream-bottom. The dates of the proposed grazing however will mostly have livestock foraging on residual grasses or only early green up of riparian herbaceous vegetation at this time of year. The number of AUM's, and the short duration will allow for regrowth needed to sustain a continued expansion of the riparian community similar to what has occurred through the rested period discussed in the Information and Background section.

Regrowth of consumed herbaceous and expansion of vigorous willow, cottonwood, alder and aspen trees, presently in the allotment, will allow the riparian zone to withstand typical flood flows. Late July and August are typical peak flow periods and cows will be gone. In the event of a high pack snow year, an April-May runoff in this elevation will have passed prior to the cattle grazing period. The proposed action has the benefit of initiating the removal of old fences down within the riparian zone which are in disrepair and at risk of being flood washed. These fences also are at risk of being incorporated into an expanding beaver pond complex should the drought subside and beaver colonize the region. Removing the unneeded fencing is sensible.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: Monitor that the rotation occurs as planned and follows the utilization limits.

Cumulative Impacts: Grazing this section of public land riparian is cumulative to all other grazing of lands up and downstream of this pasture on public, state, but primarily private lands. Grazing this pasture as specified will however keep the riparian zone here at this location in a proper functioning condition.

No Action Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Not grazing this streams riparian area keeps it intact and the ecological succession of these two miles of stream advances. The fences, however if not removed, will still be within the expanding vegetation zone.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: Old fences should be removed regardless of the grazing authority.

Other Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: The dormant season grazing alternative would be similar to the proposed action in that regrowth is allowed for and utilization is targeted to residual forage. Dormant season grazing likely would see less utilization within the riparian zone than the proposed action as snow and ice would keep livestock more restricted to south slope uplands. A

dormant season grazing schedule extending into late spring would offer less re-growth resistance in a high runoff from a heavy snowpack year and erosion could be slightly increased.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: Similar to the proposed action.

Cumulative Impacts: Similar to the proposed action.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for Riparian Systems: Cottonwood Creek in the area of the proposed action is meeting the riparian land health standard of being in proper functioning condition. This standard will be maintained under the proposed action or any alternative if rotations and utilization levels are followed.

3.2.4 Wildlife Aquatic (includes a finding on standard 3)

Affected Environment: Cottonwood Creek is a small ephemeral tributary (see also riparian section above). This stream supports a fishery in wet periods sustained by an expanding remnant population that survives drought in seep supported segments. Fishing was popular prior to the 2002 drought, but has been greatly diminished with low precipitation years. The lack of ponded water along this stream limits its suitability to support observable populations of most regional amphibians, however it is likely they migrate through the corridor along the stream. None of the other related actions affect wetlands or aquatic habitat outside of the riparian pasture.

Environmental Effects

Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts: This stream is currently in good condition and recovered from historical degradation (see riparian section). The possibility of beaver colonization would expand ponded environments, but that possibility will not be altered by the planned grazing. Actual impacts to the stream from grazing will primarily be from crossing and stream margin grazing, however much of the segment in the riparian pasture is heavily wooded with willow, alder, cottonwood and aspen of sizes generally out of the reach of livestock. Because livestock are watershed wide on mostly private land, grazing on the public does not introduce any issues beyond what currently exist except for the direct impact to local vegetation; for example the nutrient loads or risk of weeds, disease, etc. would be similar even with resting this relatively short segment.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: Monitor that the rotation occurs as planned and follows the utilization limits.

Cumulative Impacts: Grazing this section of public land riparian is cumulative to all other grazing of lands up and downstream of this pasture on public, state, but primarily private lands. Grazing this pasture as specified will however keep the riparian zone at this location in a proper functioning condition.

No Action Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: None

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None

Other Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: The dormant season grazing alternative would be similar to the proposed action in that regrowth is allowed for and utilization is targeted to residual forage. Dormant season grazing likely would see less utilization within the riparian zone than the proposed action however as snow and ice would keep livestock more restricted to south slope uplands. A dormant season grazing schedule extending into late spring would offer less regrowth resistance to a high runoff from a heavy snowpack year in April-May. In this case there is the probability of less streamside grass to dampen runoff and erosion would likely be measurable higher. Higher silt loads would cloud any standing water along the margins of the stream.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: Similar to the proposed action.

Cumulative Impacts: Similar to the proposed action.

Finding on the Public Land Health Standard for Plant and Animal Communities: The current status of the fishery present in Cottonwood Creek has been impacted by drought. Less is known about the amphibian population here, but presumably the regional species have evolved to such cycles within the watershed. There is no known reason why the proposed action or any alternative (however the proposed action is preferable), would substantially limit aquatic wildlife or habitat in this relatively short reach of stream beyond what the current drought has done, or at a larger scale, what major changes that have occurred on non public land.

3.2.5 Wildlife Terrestrial (includes a finding on standard 3)

Affected Environment: The Soapy Hill and Cottonwood Creek areas have been rested for many years, and as a result, have recovered to functioning conditions. A recent forestry project on the allotment has allowed sunlight to break through the canopy, allowing the understory to re-emerge with grass, forb, and shrub species.

Several habitat types are found within the area covered by these allotments. On South facing slopes, the habitat types are primarily oak shrubland intermixed with mountain mahogany and current and some piñon and juniper trees. Terraces above the riparian area contain a mixture of cool and warm season grasses. Ponderosa pine, mixed conifer and mountain shrubland habitats are found along the slopes in the project area. The vegetative type is generally determined by the slope and aspect. In Fremont County these sites are very dry and warm areas, with less than 25 inches of precipitation annually. The primary forest type is mature ponderosa pine. Grassy ground was produced by recent forest projects. Other common understory shrubs include mountain mahogany and wax currant. Tree species mixed with ponderosa pine are junipers, pinyon pine, aspen, white fir, and Douglas-fir.

Mule deer are likely present throughout the year; however, of importance is severe winter range along the south facing slopes. Severe winter range, as stated by Colorado Parks and Wildlife, is that part of the range of a species where 90 percent of the individuals are located when the annual snowpack is at its maximum and/or temperatures are at a minimum in the two worst winters out of ten.

Environmental Effects

Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts: The allotment in this assessment contains large areas of unsuitable range, those areas where topography restricts use by livestock. Much of the spatially mapped mule deer winter range is unsuitable for livestock grazing. These areas essentially remain as wildlife habitat with no domestic livestock grazing. Most utilization will occur within the riparian area, adjacent grassland terraces, and recently treated ponderosa stand. Within the treated ponderosa stand, an abundance of grass, forb, and shrub species have established, diversifying the vegetative structure present and improving habitat for ungulates. The allotment may be utilized by deer, elk, and turkey as yearlong habitat. Spring development and water tanks will provide little benefit to terrestrial wildlife because free water may be found at a relatively short distance.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: Monitoring is of greatest importance. Ensuring over-utilization does not occur on the riparian willow (an important browse species) wet meadow grasses, and uplands. Due to no grazing for several years, recovery has occurred on this allotment and monitoring must occur to ensure a setback does not take place.

No Action Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: The area would not be grazed and remain in its current state. The results of several studies debating grazing versus non-grazing impacts to wild ungulates remain contradictory. If grazing is managed correctly, long-term benefits may be an increase in plant species diversity, plant vigor, and reduction of excessive vegetation litter.

Studies have presented evidence that spatial competition between wild ungulate species and cattle may occur. Stewart et al. (2002) found that when cattle were present they would displace both deer and elk, forcing wild ungulates to less preferred feeding grounds. Generally, native ungulates focus on different plant species than cattle; however, when feed is scarce (late winter, early spring) these animals become generalists and compete for a common forage base. Furthermore, other research notes a positive trend in small mammal populations and diversity when grazing is removed from the landscape (Jones 2000).

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None

Dormant Season Use Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: The Dormant Season Use Alternative defers grazing use to a period of time vegetation is in dormancy and harvest occurs on residual stubble. Much of the allotment is spatially mapped as mule deer winter range. Studies have presented evidence that spatial competition between wild ungulate species and cattle may occur. Stewart et al. (2002) found that when cattle were present they would displace both deer and elk, forcing wild ungulates to less preferred feeding grounds. However, most utilization by cattle will occur within the riparian area, adjacent grassland terraces, and recently treated ponderosa stand. The ruggedness of south facing slopes that are of high importance for wintering big game species will likely remain inaccessible by cattle. Allowing utilization of 80% annual production on grass species and 60% of annual production on shrub species will reduce ground cover for small mammals, diminishing the quality of habitat and increasing the susceptibility to predation. The new range improvements and adaptive management as described in the proposed action may

reduce long-term negative impacts; however, monitoring should occur to measure initial impacts and ensure the effectiveness of design features.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None.

3.2.6 Migratory Birds

Affected Environment: Several habitat types are found within the allotment. Along south facing slopes, the habitat type is primarily pinyon pine and juniper. Open areas of mountain grassland are interspersed throughout the area and mountain shrubs such as gambel oak, currant and mountain mahogany are abundant, especially on south slopes. Pinyon-juniper habitat supports the largest nesting bird species list of any upland vegetation type in the West. The richness of the pinyon-juniper vegetation type, however, is important due to its middle elevation. Survey tallies in pinyon-juniper are similar in species diversity to the best riparian. Several species are found in the pinyon-juniper habitat and include: black-chinned hummingbird, gray flycatcher, Cassin's kingbird, gray vireo, pinyon jay, juniper titmouse, black-throated gray warbler, Scott's oriole, ash-throated flycatcher, Bewick's wren, mountain chickadee, white-breasted nuthatch, and chipping sparrow.

Ponderosa pine, mixed conifer and mountain shrubland habitats are found along north facing slopes and adjacent to riparian areas. In Fremont County these sites are very dry and warm areas, with less than 25 inches of precipitation annually. Mature ponderosa pine forests on dry sites are open, with mature trees achieving wide separation as they compete for limited soil moisture. Grassy ground cover is maintained by frequent low-intensity fires. Ponderosa pines are the largest conifers in Colorado and Gambel oak is a common component of the understory, typically in a shrubby form. Other common understory shrubs include mountain mahogany and wax currant. Tree species sometimes found mixed with ponderosa pine are junipers, pinyon pine, aspen, white fir, and Douglas-fir. Birds typical of these habitat types include Merriam's turkey, Williamson's sapsucker, pygmy nuthatch, western bluebird, band-tailed pigeon, Grace's warbler, flammulated owl, red-breasted nuthatch, violet-green swallow, western tanager, and chipping sparrow. These sites also include small areas of aspen habitat and mountain grassland habitat.

Environmental Effects

Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts: The results of several studies debating grazing versus non-grazing impacts to migratory birds remains mixed. If grazing is managed correctly, long-term benefits may be an increase in plant species diversity, plant vigor, and reduction of excessive vegetation litter. Bock et al. (1993) suggest very little is known in regards to impacts to migratory birds from grazing in western forests. Historically, these areas were exposed to heavy grazing which correlates with the transformation of these woodlands into denser forests with a decreased understory of herbaceous plants. This transformation diminished the frequency of low intensity fire. Furthermore, historical grazing regimes correlate with the expansion of pinyon-juniper woodland. Over grazing reduced cover of grasses, facilitating establishment of pinyon-juniper seedlings and simultaneously reducing ground fires that otherwise might eliminate

woody vegetation. The change in herbaceous structure caused a change in migratory bird species occupancy by negatively affecting species dependent on herbaceous and shrubby cover or species that require open savannahs, but positively affecting species requiring closed canopy systems. Currently, BLM's standards for public land health do not allow for excessive grazing that would alter forest structure in the manner historical grazing regimes may have. These allotments are currently meeting standards 2, 3, and 4 which indicate grazing is having a negligible impact to migratory bird habitat.

The water tanks are expected to disperse cattle use throughout the allotment and produce a more uniform utilization throughout the allotment. The end goal will sustain riparian recovery, maintaining the overall wildlife habitat. The proposed action will minimize livestock concentration areas, reducing regular disruption and abandonment to nesting birds. The probability of cattle crushing nests and burrows will also be reduced. However, many ground and shrub nesting birds have adapted distraction and defense behaviors to lead animals away from the nest sites.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: In order for BLM to be in compliance with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, requiring that BLM avoid actions that "take" migratory birds, it is recommended that all vegetation disturbances be avoided from May 15 thru July 15. This is the breeding and brood rearing season for most Colorado migratory birds. Construction of allotment infrastructure that may take migratory birds and/or nests should be completed outside the primary nesting season of May 15 thru July 15.

No Action Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: The area would not be grazed and remain in its current state. Bock et al. (1993) conducted a literature review on avian responses to grazing in a multitude of habitats and found that bird species generally showed a negative response. Reasons for a negative response include, but are not limited to a reduction in nesting cover and disturbance or destruction of nests by cattle. Overall, migratory birds would likely show a net benefit from the no grazing alternative.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None.

Dormant Season Use Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: The Dormant Season Use Alternative defers grazing use to a period of time vegetation is in dormancy and harvest occurs on residual stubble. Allowing utilization of 80% annual production on grass species and 60% of annual production on shrub species may be a detriment to species by removing residual cover prior to the nesting season. Furthermore, high utilization of dormant vegetation over time will diminish ground cover and residual material needed for protection of ground and low vegetation nesting species. Overall, damage to vegetation is less during winter and direct impacts on avian communities are minimal since populations are at annual lows, consisting only of permanent and winter resident species. Monitoring should occur to measure initial impacts of high utilization standards and ensure the effectiveness of design features.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None.

3.3 LAND RESOURCES

3.3.1 Range Management

Affected Environment: The Soapy Hill Allotment #05162 consists of 1,336 acres of BLM lands of which probably one third of the allotment is not suitable to livestock grazing due to slope and vegetation. The allotment has been vacant due to the lack of in boundary fencing and the need for more livestock water. The existing fencing located along Cottonwood Creek was once used as water gaps between the old Upper Meadow Gulch and Soapy Hill Allotments.

Environmental Effects

Proposed Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts: The proposed action as scheduled for the allotment meets the Standards for Public Land Health and Guidelines for Livestock Grazing in Colorado. The grazing schedule provides for vegetation deferment during most of the growing season and utilization restrictions that will allow for soil stability and plant health. Implementing the new range improvements on the allotment will promote even and dispersed livestock use on the allotment and open new areas to grazing that typically would not be grazed. Adaptive management gives the BLM and permittee the flexibility to implement a number of tools to meet desired conditions on the ground and adapt to environmental changes that may occur on an annual basis.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None.

Cumulative Impacts: See Cumulative Impacts Summary

No Grazing Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Under this alternative, grazing use would not be authorized on the allotment. There are negative impacts inherited by both the applicant and the BLM under this alternative. There are existing improvements located on the allotment consisting of cattle guards, fences and spring developments. These improvements would require annual maintenance by BLM or BLM would be required to remove these improvements. There is likely potential for unauthorized grazing use in this area and BLM would be responsible to monitor the public lands and take legal action as this occurs. Lastly, the grazing applicant would be denied the ability to graze on public lands and need to find alternative forage resources.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: BLM will maintain or remove existing range improvements and monitor for livestock trespass.

Dormant Season Use Alternative

Direct and Indirect Impacts: Defers grazing use to the dormant season from September 15 thru March 31. Even though the proposal allows for flexibility in the grazing season, there is the potential for heavy snow during these times that may reduce the amount of forage available to livestock. Plants are in dormancy during this period and less susceptible to herbivory. Snow

during this period is very unpredictable and could cause harm if cattle were stranded in an area due to heavy snow.

Protective/Mitigation Measures: None.

Cumulative Impacts: None.

3.6 CUMULATIVE IMPACTS SUMMARY

The geographic scope of cumulative impacts is the area described as the Waugh Mtn. / Tallahassee Creek Sub-region in the Royal Gorge Resource Area Resource Management Plan. Within this area, BLM manages approximately 70,145 acres of public land. The area also consists of approximately 114,341 acres of private and 12,250 acres of state land. Livestock grazing has been a major component in this area since settlement and is integral to the local economy. Grazing management as prescribed on public lands is more intensive than management of the surrounding private and state lands and incorporates other resource values, such as wildlife, cultural, soils, vegetative and riparian on the public land into account to a greater degree. The proposed action includes protection for vegetative, soils, cultural and riparian values. These standards assure sufficient residual vegetation to protect soil from wind and water erosion and allow adequate seed dissemination and seedling establishment. Therefore, the impacts of the proposed action on the allotments in this assessment, together with those of other similar BLM actions within the sub-region, will be protection and improvement of the diversity and vigor of vegetative resources on public land in the sub-region over time. Other foreseeable impacts include private land development and fragmentation, and local drought conditions. These impacts could have direct and indirect impacts to these public lands.

There is extensive grazing in the region on private, public, and state lands. Grazing this pasture (and allotment) is cumulative to all other grazing. Because this is the headwater pasture, grazing affects do not occur outside of agency control above this pasture so the prescription set annually for when to graze this pasture is the primary impact to this segment of stream. Regionally, because of the harsh weather, most grazing on riparian areas nearby is also during the growing season so time allotted for regrowth here is important where that may not be considered so much regionally.

Grazing on the adjacent public and private lands is the largest impact. Overall, minimal acreage is rested, reducing available cover and nesting habitat for migratory birds.

CHAPTER 4 - CONSULTATION AND COORDINATION

4.1 LIST OF PREPARERS AND PARTICIPANTS

Please see Interdisciplinary Team Review list for BLM Participants

CHAPTER 5 - REFERENCES

Bock, C. E., V. A. Saab, T. D. Rich, and D. S. Dobkin. 1993. Effects of livestock grazing on neotropical migratory landbirds in western North America. In: Finch, D. M., P. W. Stangel (eds.). Status and management of neotropical migratory birds: September 21-25, 1992, Estes Park, Colorado. Gen. Tech. Rep. RM-229. Fort Collins, Colo.: Rocky Mountain Forest and Range Experiment Station, U.S. Dept. of Agriculture, Forest Service: 296-309.

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Stewart, K. M., R. T. Bowyer, J. G. Kie, N. J. Cimon, and B. K. Johnson. 2002. Temporospatial distributions of elk, mule deer, and cattle: resource partitioning and competitive displacement. *Journal of Mammalogy* 83: 229-244.

Finding Of No Significant Impact (FONSI)

DOI-BLM-CO-200-2013-0044 EA

Based on review of the EA and the supporting documents, I have determined that the project is not a major federal action and will not have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment, individually or cumulatively with other actions in the general area. No environmental effects from any alternative assessed or evaluated meet the definition of significance in context or intensity, as defined by 43 CFR 1508.27. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not required. This finding is based on the context and intensity of the project as described below:

RATIONALE:

Context: The Proposed Action alternative authorizes grazing use on the Soapy Hill Allotment and issues a permit for ten years. Adaptive Management measures are included to help mitigate potential future impacts.

The allotment is located in Fremont County Colorado roughly 30 miles northwest of Canon City at an elevation of 8,500 feet and consists of grassland/shrub parks, Ponderosa grasslands and Douglas fir stands. The proposed Soapy Hill allotment will be comprised of two smaller allotments previously known as Soapy Hill and Upper Meadow Gulch allotments. The allotment is found to be meeting land health standards and is essential to the permittee's livestock operation and economic wellbeing.

Intensity:

I have considered the potential intensity/severity of the impacts anticipated from the Soapy Hill Allotment Project decision relative to each of the ten areas suggested for consideration by the CEQ. With regard to each:

Impacts that may be beneficial and adverse:

Through the land health assessments and environmental analysis, adverse impacts to the allotment and the environment can be managed and mitigated. The benefits of these analyses that are reflected in the proposed action consist of proper grazing management practices. Grazing use on the vegetation is limited to a short period thereby allowing for plant rest and recovery. Utilization restrictions are in place to protect the soil resources and provide forage and cover for wildlife. Adaptive management practices are used when resource conditions are at risk and tools are in place to remedy the situation in a timely manner. In addition, practices could be implemented when unforeseen circumstances occur such as drought and/or fire. The allotment proposed for grazing authorization is meeting BLM Land Health Standards.

There is a direct effect on riparian vegetation from this action in that cows will wander into the entrenched riparian area off of the flatter adjacent terraces, cross it in numerous locations as they travel up and downstream and graze within the flatter portions of the stream-bottom. This impact however is attenuated by dates of proposed grazing that minimize impacts.

Public health and safety: The proposed action reflects analyses and management practices that do the most to protect important water supplies by preventing erosion and sediment production. Due to the dry, upland nature of a portion of the allotment being analyzed, sediment production, from a water quality standpoint, is the biggest concern from grazing. The proposed action would leave sufficient ground cover present to protect the soils from eroding and downstream waters would not be affected from grazing on public lands.

Unique characteristics of the geographic area: The EA evaluated the area of the proposed action and determined that no unique geographic characteristics such as: wild and scenic rivers, prime or unique farmlands, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern or designated wilderness areas or wilderness study areas were present.

Degree to which effects are likely to be highly controversial: Analysis for the renewal of grazing permits is a common action conducted under NEPA. Conditions and impacts will vary and be unique to each allotment. There is no disagreement or controversy among ID team members or reviewers over the nature of the effects of the action on resource values.

Degree to which effects are highly uncertain or involve unique or unknown risks: BLM has a long history of managing public lands for multiple-use. Grazing is one part of that multiple-use mandate. Given the BLM's institutional knowledge on this subject, all risks were considered in the EA and were found to be neither unique nor unknown.

Consideration of whether the action may establish a precedent for future actions with significant impacts: The proposed action does establish a standard of precedent for the permit renewal process, in that there is comprehensive review of all resource values and land health standards are either met or exceeded.

Consideration of whether the action is related to other actions with cumulatively significant impacts: In general, the allotment in this analysis area is adjacent to private and state lands. The continuation of livestock grazing on public lands will in part help promote or maintain ranching in the area and open space. In addition, the continuation of livestock grazing as described in the proposed action will not create any new cumulative impacts to the existing situation and given BLMs intense management practices, renewing the grazing could contribute to enhancing land health and productivity.

Scientific, cultural or historical resources, including those listed in or eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places: Pursuant to BLM Instruction Memorandum Number CO-2002-029, RGFO cultural resources staff conducted a literature review of previous inventories conducted and sites recorded on the public land in the allotment area. During a field visit, the areas of new range improvements were evaluated and no historic properties were

present. Based on the information collected during the literature review, it was determined that no historic properties would be impacted by the proposed undertaking.

Threatened and endangered species and their critical habitat: There are no known threatened and endangered, or sensitive species known to inhabit this location. The proposed action will not result in any significant impacts to threatened and endangered or sensitive species.

Any effects that threaten a violation of Federal, State or local law or requirements imposed for the protection of the environment: The proposed action conforms with the provisions of NEPA (U.S.C. 4321-4346) and FLPMA (43 U.S.C. 1701 et seq.) and is compliant with the Clean Water Act and The Clean Air Act, the National Historic Preservation Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act (MBTA) and the Endangered Species Act.

NAME OF PREPARER: Jeff Williams

SUPERVISORY REVIEW: Melissa K.S. Garcia

NAME OF ENVIRONMENTAL COORDINATOR: /s/ Martin Weimer

DATE: 12/6/13

SIGNATURE OF AUTHORIZED OFFICIAL:

/s/ Keith E. Berger
Keith E. Berger, Field Manager

DATE SIGNED: 12/9/13

APPENDICES:

ATTACHMENTS: